



February 21, 2014

Planning & Development Committee
Senator Catherine Osten, co-chairman
Representative Jason Rojas, co-chairman

In Support of SB 114 An Act Establishing a Property Tax Program to Encourage the Preservation of Historic Barns.

My name is Helen Higgins and I am director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. I am here today to speak in **support** of SB 114.

The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1975 by a special act of the Connecticut General Assembly and is a statewide non-profit resource for preservation and re-use of our historic buildings.

Since 2004 the Trust has been documenting historic barns; to date we have over 8300 in our data base. A high percentage of those barns are in need of stabilization work, for example roof repair, sill repairs, mortar repair.

SB 114 authorizes towns and cities to grant property tax relief to barn owners of historic barns, barns 75 years old or older that are listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places, who agree to maintain their structures throughout a minimum 10-year preservation easement. We believe that this kind of relief acts as an incentive for maintenance and repair of these structures. In New Hampshire, where the barns tax incentive program has been in place for 11 years, 462 barns have been enrolled. The decision determining which barns in a community are eligible for the program lies with the municipality. Criteria are based on not just a barn's historic importance but that it provides scenic enjoyment from a public way. The money saved on taxes can go into barn repair. Some barn owners feel they are better off letting their barns fall down because they are too financially strapped to repair them. We must help owners care for their certified historic barns and encourage them to find uses for these structures, if they are not already being used.

For many of our state's historic barns, there may be a future use that the current owner had not considered, either back to agriculture or to a new adaptive re-use. A further benefit of the barn tax abatement is that jobs will be created for roofers, timber-framers, engineers, masons and the like. These jobs are done by in-state resident contractors.

Barns are a significant part of Connecticut's heritage and cultural landscape; people love to drive around the state and see our old barns. But also, as interest grows in locally sourced foods, these precious buildings can and should be brought back to life.